Tradition and the Individual Talent According to Hugh Kenner

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"TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT"

ACCORDING TO HIGH KENNER

by

David Allen McNutt, S.J.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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AUTHOR'S LIFE

David Allen McNutt, S.J., was born in Chicago, Illinois, January 23, 1937.

He attended the St. Philip Neri parish school in Chicago, from which he was graduated in June, 1950. The following September he entered St. Ignatius High School. After graduation in 1958, he enrolled in the College of Arts of the University of Notre Dame. In September, 1956, he entered the Jesuit Novitiate at Milford, Ohio, and was enrolled in the College of Arts of Xavier University. In August, 1960, he entered West Baden College and was enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts course of Loyola University, Chicago. He received the Bachelor's degree in June, 1961, and that same month entered the Graduate School of Loyola University to pursue studies for the degree of Master of Arts.

In that same month also, he began research for this present thesis under the direction of Reverend Joseph C. Milunas, S.J.
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CHAPTER I

"TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT"

The essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" helped establish Mr. T. S. Eliot's reputation as a critic and also set the keynote for much of modern criticism. Subsequently, in the recent "revaluation" of Mr. Eliot's stature both as poet and as critic, this essay has once again held a key place.

The revaluation, however, supposes a correct knowledge of what Mr. Eliot's positions in the essay really were; and the actual fact of the matter is that the various critics who have attacked, defended, qualified, or appealed to the essay in the forty-five years since it was written have revealed a divergence of opinion as to what it was that Eliot really meant.

In this thesis I wish to present and evaluate one interpretation of the essay, that offered by Mr. Hugh Kenner. My reasons for so narrowly limiting the scope of this thesis are many. First, Mr. Kenner's treatment of the essay is the only consciously scholarly and historical treatment having any really radical bearing upon the actual interpretation of it. Other critics have presumed certain interpretations of it, suggested other possible interpretations, even offered argumentation defending one interpretation against another, but few of them offer any solidly documented historical verification for their positions.¹ Of those who do attempt to trace Eliot's ideas to their sources,

¹F. R. Leavis' "T. S. Eliot's Stature as a Critic" (Commentary, XXVI [November, 1958], 339-410) exemplifies what I mean to say here.
none but Kenner obtain any really radical insight into the actual interpretation of "Tradition and the Individual Talent." They uncover sources, but the discovery has no significant bearing upon what we understand Eliot's essay to be saying.¹

My second reason for restricting my treatment to Kenner's interpretation of the essay is that a really complete presentation and critique of this one interpretation, to be accomplished adequately, requires the space of an entire thesis. For Kenner's comments, first of all, are scattered throughout the length of an entire book dealing with another more general subject. Those, therefore, which are specifically pertinent to "Tradition and the Individual Talent" must be collected together and their relevance to the essay made clear. Secondly, Kenner's interpretation rests upon an understanding of idealist philosophy and of one version of that philosophy in particular, an understanding which must penetrate to an awareness of the ways in which that philosophy can actually structure a person's sensibilities. Since this particular philosophy is, for most people, a very difficult one to comprehend, and since the knowledge of it required for our purposes is far from being a superficial one, a relatively detailed treatment of Kenner's exposition of it will be necessary. Finally, this presentation by Kenner of Eliot's essay and of its underlying philosophy contains, in my opinion, a number of serious defects and requires, therefore, a rather thoroughgoing critique.

The present chapter of this thesis will present an overview of Eliot's essay. The next will outline Kenner's interpretation, expanding or criticizing

¹The contribution of Sean Lucy would be classified in this category. Op. infrav., pp. 74-75.
individual points as they come up. The final chapter will offer a more general expansion and critique of Kenner's fundamental positions.

First let me outline in a general and non-commital manner the main content of "Tradition and the Individual Talent," pointing out the major areas of later interpretation and criticism which the essay involves.

Eliot opens the essay by pointing to the then current flavor of the word "tradition," a flavor normally pejorative, though sometimes "vaguely approbative, with the implication, as to the work approved, of some pleasing archaeological construction."1 Hinting that the English might be a little more consciously critical ("articulating what passes in our minds when we read a book or feel an emotion about it, . . ., criticizing our own minds in their work of criticism"),2 he suggests that such criticism might reveal a tendency to value and to praise those parts of a poet's work that are "individual" and reveal the "peculiar essence of the man," the parts in which "he least resembles anyone else, . . . especially his immediate predecessors." However, "if we approach a poet without this prejudice," Eliot continues, "we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."3

2 Ibid., pp. 13-14.
3 Ibid., p. 14. As Eliot himself notes here, he is speaking of a mature poet and not simply of a beginner who is learning by imitation.
Tradition is not merely a matter of inheriting and continuing what was done by the preceding generation. In fact, "it cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor." A writer is "traditional" if he possesses, "in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order." This historical sense is a sense of "the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together." It makes a writer not only "traditional," but also "most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity."¹

Any poet's or artist's "meaning," "significance," and "appreciation" is complete only when he is considered in relation to the poets and artists of the past. Full criticism must consider his "contrast and comparison" with them. Does he "conform"? Does he "cohere"? This conformity and coherence is two-directional:

What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of

¹Tbid.
the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities.¹

He will also be "judged by the standards of the past," "by a judgment" that is a "comparison, in which two things are measured by each other." His work does not "conform merely." It must also be "new," "individual," a "work of art," at the same time that it "fits in." This "fitting in is a test of its value," but "we do not quite say that the new is more valuable because it fits in." Thus the new work is "judged by the standards of the past, . . . not amputated by them; not judged to be as good as, or worse or better than, the dead; and certainly not judged by the canons of the dead critics." This judgment, made according to the test of fitting in, must be made "slowly and cautiously" since "we are none of us infallible judges of conformity."²

The poet must be aware of the "main current, which does not at all flow invariably through the most distinguished reputations." The "important experience" of the young poet's forming himself upon one or two favorite authors is not sufficient. Nor can he direct himself wholly by the patterns of one period, though this practice is a "pleasant and wholly desirable supplement." Rather, "he must be aware that the mind of Europe—the mind of his own country—a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind—is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing en route." For "art never improves, but . . . the material of art is never quite the same." The change of the mind of Europe, its

¹Ibid., p. 15.
²Ibid., pp. 15-16. Emphasis not in the original.
"development," is "refinement perhaps, complication certainly," is not, "from the point of view of the artist, any improvement," although it may or may not be of improved value from other points of view. "But the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show." The writers of the past seem remote because "we know so much more than they did." But, Eliot points out, "they are that which we know."\(^1\)

Eliot carefully distinguishes this "consciousness of the past" which a mature writer must have from the possession of "erudition (pedantry)." The "knowledge" that the writer should have should not be confined to "whatever can be put into a useful state for examinations, drawing-rooms, or the still more pretentious modes of publicity. Shakespeare, for example, "acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum."\(^2\)

The result of the poet's development of this consciousness of the past is "a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable, ... a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality." This "process of depersonalization," a process by which "art may be said to approach the condition of science," is explained by Eliot in terms of an analogy between the effect of a chemical catalyst upon the elements it brings into combination and the effect of the artist's mind upon the materials of his art, "emotions" and "feelings." A poem may be "formed

\(^{1}\)Ibid., p. 16. Emphasis of wholly not in the original.

\(^{2}\)Ibid., pp. 16–17.
out of one emotion, out of several emotions, out of a combination of emotions and feelings, or out of feelings only. The mind of the poet, like a catalyst, brings about the change, but does not itself enter into the constitution of the finished product. Like the catalyst, it is not itself changed in any way.

"It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates." The mind is, as Aristotle said, set apart from suffering, passionless: the mind of a poet is a "medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations." Thus the mind of the mature poet is differentiated from that of a less mature poet, not in terms of the former's being "more interesting or having 'more to say,'" but rather in terms of the higher degree of its fineness and perfection as a medium in which this combining of feelings and emotions can take place. In the whole of this account of the work of the poet, "the point of view which I am struggling to attack is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul; for my meaning is, that the poet has, not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality." Poetry "is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality." The poet must strive to

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1Ibid., pp. 17-18.
2Ibid., p. 21. Aristotle's quotation introduces the essay's conclusion.
3Ibid., p. 17.
4Ibid., p. 19. This quotation is of key importance in the essay.
5Ibid., p. 20.
achieve "impersonality" by "surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done."¹

The process of writing poetry, therefore, is not correctly expressed in terms of the formula "emotion recollected in tranquillity." The process is not a recollection, but rather a "concentration," a concentration which is neither conscious nor deliberate. "In fact, the bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious presumably by an awareness of the past?", and conscious where he ought to be unconscious. Both errors tend to make him 'personal.'" The unconscious, non-deliberate "concentration . . . of a very great number of experiences" that occurs in the creation of a poem takes place in an "atmosphere which is 'tranquil' only in that it is a passive attending upon the event." This passive, unconscious work of the good poet, of course, not the only element involved in his writing of a poem; but it is an essential one.²

The materials which are brought together in the poem are, as mentioned above,³ "emotions" and "feelings"—"passions"—"experience." The poet uses "nurderless feelings, phrases, images."⁴ But he does not simply express "emotion," the emotion evoked by actual events in his life; he expresses, rather, "a new art emotion." He uses the "ordinary" emotions of real life, "working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual

¹Ibid., p. 21.
²Ibid., pp. 20-21.
³P. 6. For greater clarity, I am treating the "materials" here.
⁴Eliot, loc. cit., p. 18.
emotions at all."¹ Thus "the effect of a work of art upon the person who enjoys it is an experience different in kind from any experience not of art." The elements which are concentrated into the poem in order to give this new experience need not include "emotions" at all; or they may include emotions combined with "an image, a feeling attaching to an image, which 'came,' which did not develop simply out of [the emotion with which it becomes connected].²

As a result, the "greatness" of a poem is not to be measured in terms of the "semi-ethical criterion" of the "sublimity" of the emotions expressed nor in terms of the "greatness" or the "intensity" of these emotions. These emotions, in a poem that makes use of emotions, are only the components of the poem, not the poem itself. It is "the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts."

Through this process of "transmutation of emotion," the "intensity" of the poetry becomes "something quite different from whatever intensity in the supposed experience it may give the impression of." The artistic emotion may "approximate" the emotion of an actual spectator of an event (as the artistic emotions evoked in a viewer of the Agamemnon approximate the emotions that would be evoked simply by witnessing the actual events portrayed, or as the artistic emotions of Othello approximate those of Othello himself); "but the difference between art and the event is always absolute." The event will always be found to be "inadequate to" the art emotion, the "whole effect," the

¹Ibid., p. 20.
²Ibid., p. 18. Eliot offers examples of several various "combinations,"
"dominant tone." For this effect and tone will often be "due to the fact that a number of floating feelings, have an affinity to the emotion evoked by the event by no means superficially evident, have combined with it to give us a new art emotion." ¹

Because of this fact, that the emotions of real life enter into the finished poem only as its material components, the poet's "personal" emotions, those which have been evoked by individual events in his own life, are not very important. They may be "remarkable or interesting, . . . simple, or crude, or flat"; it makes no difference in the poetry. "The emotion in his poetry will be a very complex thing, but not with the complexity of the emotions of people who have very complex or unusual emotions in life." (In fact, not only is it true that the poet can make use of ordinary emotions, but it is a dangerous occasion for "eccentricity" in poetry if he does not do so: "one error . . . is to seek for new human emotions to express," a search "for novelty in the wrong place" which only "discovers the perverse." ²) "Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality." ³ In fact, emotions the poet has never experienced himself may be just as useful to him as any others. ⁴

¹Ibid., pp. 18-20.
²Ibid., p. 20. The true place for novelty is in new art combinations.
³Ibid., p. 19.
⁴Ibid., p. 20. Eliot merely makes this assertion without developing it.
The art emotion is thus not merely the "expression of sincere emotion in verse," nor even the expression of this sincere emotion with "technical excellence." The art emotion, at least of a truly high-level poem, is an expression of "significant emotion, emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet," emotion which is "impersonal" with an "impersonality" achieved only by the poet's "surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done," discovered to be such only when he lives "in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, . . . conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living." ¹

This, then, is the general import of Eliot's essay. It calls for a turning away from the kind of criticism and appreciation that asks what emotion or experience of his life the poet is expressing in a given poem; and it asks, rather, for a consideration of what the poem itself, apart from any reference to the poet, is saying or expressing. It makes a twofold point: (1) that each poem should be appreciated and judged as part of a "living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written," and (2) that the mind of the poet is not a "personality" to be expressed, not the actual material that enters into the poem, but, rather, a medium in which the real materials of the poem, emotions and feelings, can be fused into a new art emotion.

¹Ibid., p. 21.
CHAPTER II

KENNER

In his 1959 book, Mr. Hugh Kenner characterizes T. S. Eliot as "the Invisible Poet." This invisibility, Mr. Kenner says, "is partly a deliberate achievement (he is the 'impersonal' poet, and also Old Possum), partly a result of chance, but chiefly a consequence of the nature of his writing, which resists elucidation as stubbornly as Alice in Wonderland."

This basic impenetrability of Eliot's work is seen as deriving from a particular poetic method, which, in turn, implies a particular view of the nature of things.

The poetic method in question is that of "incantatory poetry." In works such as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "Gerontion," and The Waste Land, "a quality inherent in all incantatory poetry, poetry that eschews the statement and evokes the unspoken mood, is being deliberately pressed by Eliot into the service of a corresponding view of things." Prufrock, Gerontion, and Tiresias are not characters; each is rather "the name of a possible zone of consciousness where the materials with which he is credited with being aware can co-exist." And, in the extreme case of Tiresias, the materials with which he is credited with being aware extend out into "literary echoes and mythological

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2 Ibid., p. 36.
traditions as old as the human race."\(^1\) Eliot's style, his method is "the most generalising style in English literature, capable, as Marshall McLuhan has pointed out, of summing up all possible relevant case histories in an imaged 'state,'" so that, for example, the initial situation in Prufrock's "Love Song" is not an individual historical or fictional event, but the presentation of a state which is, in McLuhan's words, "inclusive of every mode of metamorphosis or schizophrenia from the shaman to the medium and the poet, on the one hand, and of every possible combination of ultimate disappointment and rage, on the other hand." Each possible "case history" of a person having such an experience is a possible "explanation" of the state expressed in the poem.\(^2\)

This "capacity for generalisation" found in Eliot and "latent in any 'verbalist' poetic, or in any poetry descended from an efflorescent poetic drama, is brought to fruition by Mr. Eliot under the auspices of an idealist philosophy, much meditated during his student years, for which a person is continuous with \(^3\) That philosophy was the philosophy of Francis Herbert Bradley (1846-1924), a philosophy which is, therefore, of great importance for the full understanding of "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

For, according to Kenner, Eliot made much use of the incantatory techniques of Tennyson and Swinburne and their contemporaries which created a separate-from-reality "world made out of words";\(^4\) but, unlike these predecessors of his,

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\(^1\)Ibid.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 37. Note the psychological terminology used by the critic.

\(^3\)Ibid. The Greek means "the universe (of Being)" or "the whole."

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 8.
Eliot fully realized that these techniques implied a very definite philosophical view of the nature of reality. This realization came in great part from his study, after the period of his early poetry, of Bradley and "released him from any notion that the art his temperament bade him practice was an eccentric art, evading for personal and temporary reasons a more 'normal,' more orderly unfolding from statement." He had written the poetry, seen that it was different from that of other poets, discovered Bradley's philosophy as being very similar to the view of reality that his own poetic technique seemed to postulate. Then in the critical writing from 1917 to 1921, he "carried out," both by way of supplying a necessary basis for his development as a poet and by way of supplying a necessary basis for his subsistence, "what must be the most arduous, the most concentrated critical labor of which detailed record exists: nothing less than a rethinking, in the specific terms exacted by conscientious book reviewing of the traditional heritage of English letters." This rethinking was necessary for Eliot in his development as a poet. He had achieved successes, most notably "Prufrock"; but mere success in the writing of poetry does not assure the fruitful development of that poetry:

It is conceivable that a man working at random might put together a passage which would afford rich satisfaction to a sensibility not yet developed, not to be developed for another two centuries. And this passage might not satisfy its creator; might seem to him a failure, or more likely (we are partial to what we have done) an attractive novelty. And such a success—anticipating the canons of a posterity which has not arrived—is of no use to the poet who achieves it now; because, answering to no criteria he can grasp, it contains no indications accessible to him respecting what he next proposes to write.

1Ibid., p. 36.
2Ibid., p. 48. The emphasis is not in the original quotation.
3Ibid., pp. 81-82.
He is only able to "experiment"; he cannot "develop." For "to develop is to understand enough of your own past achievement to go on with it: to see what has so far been done by yourself and by others, your predecessors and contemporaries; and a young poet in 1917 can only see what the most alert 1917 eyes are sensitized to."¹

It is this necessity to understand his own achievement that caused Eliot to give so much attention to tradition:

Tradition is simply what has been done, so far as we can understand it. And the more deeply we understand it, the more subtle our appreciation of what already exists, the more thoroughly shall our minds be prepared to understand what we ourselves do.

We accomplish the achievement without knowing how we did it; "and unless we understand it when we have done it: understand, that is, not what brought our own words into being (impossible), but how, once in being, they relate to what already exists, we have no means of going on, of doing anything but wait for another piece of luck which we may not recognize when it has happened."²

Furthermore, "'if our predecessors cannot teach us to write better than themselves,' Eliot wrote in 1918, 'they will surely teach us to write worse: because we have never learned to criticize Keats, Shelley, and Wordsworth (poets of assured though modest merit), Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth [sic] punish us from their graves with the annual scourge of the Georgian Anthology." Thus "'every turn of time when the work of four or five men who count has reached middle age is a crisis'; and a crisis to be met not by insurrection but by tireless inspection of all that exists with fresh eyes."³

¹Ibid., p. 92.
²Ibid. A number of the expressions used in Kenner's descriptions of Eliot's possibly indicate a little too much "reading in" into the past.
³Ibid., p. 93.
This sustained work of rethinking the whole English tradition which Eliot engaged himself in received its "more or less definitive summations," according to Kenner, in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and "Rhetoric and Poetic Drama."¹

Thus the poetic method of incantatory poetry, Kenner asserts, given a philosophical basis by the thought of Bradley and then reexamined and criticized in the light of the "whole English tradition," lead to a great body of critical summaries of various values and defects found in that tradition, a body of criticism the main ideas of which received more or less definitive summation in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and "Rhetoric and Poetic Drama."

Therefore, to fully understand the essay on tradition, it is necessary to understand three things: (1) the nature of Eliot's early poetry, (2) the philosophy of Bradley, and (3) those parts of the early criticism that may give additional insights into Eliot's thinking on the matters raised in the tradition essay.

The importance of Kenner's insights and research should be stressed here: in the three areas he treats, especially the area of the influence of Bradley on Eliot's thought, he does not merely point to the sources of the essay; he actually points to insights that are necessary for the very understanding and interpretation of it. For, if Mr. Kenner's analysis is correct, both Eliot's poetry and his criticism, including the critical essay on tradition with which we are concerned, must be understood within the context of an idealistic view of reality—of the "person" (or "personality"), of the nature and function of expression, of time, and so forth.

In order to present Mr. Kenner's position and the implications it holds

¹Ibid., p. 99.
for the understanding of the essay on tradition, it is necessary to give a very clear exposition of what an idealist view of the world entails, an exposition that does not simply give an abstract summary of the principal "tenets" of the philosophy but which actually gives "the feel of it," the experience of seeing the world as it is seen by a person influenced by it. For it is my contention (and I believe it is Mr. Kenner's also) that a person's sensibility is actually affected by his philosophical beliefs. In Eliot's case, Mr. Kenner would seem to assert that Eliot's sensibilities were not changed by his exposure to Bradley, but that the latter's philosophy served mainly to explicate more formally the way of seeing things to which Eliot had become accustomed.\(^1\) Nevertheless, for a person not accustomed to seeing things in the way Mr. Eliot does (or, at least did), an understanding and experience of the idealist outlook would seem to be a strict necessity if he is to understand the essay on tradition correctly, at least if he is to see it as in any way making real sense.

In attempting to express this understanding and experience (as opposed to an unsympathetic and thus basically uncomprehending abstract formulation) of the Bradleyan outlook, I will note a fair number of the examples, both of Bradley's expression of it and of Eliot's, presented by Mr. Kenner; and I will also venture more deeply into sources treated more or less briefly by Kenner as well as offering an analysis of implications I feel he overlooks. (It should be noted, however, that Mr. Kenner was not concerned, as I am here, with an elucidation specifically of "Tradition and the Individual Talent." While he does treat the essay briefly, the treatment is in the more general context of his presentation of Eliot as "the Invisible Poet"; and much of the material presented by him

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 49.
which I shall bring to bear on the one essay by Eliot was introduced into Kenner’s book with no direct reference to that essay, but rather with reference to the understanding of Eliot’s poetry.)

The nature of Eliot’s early poetry, insofar as it is relevant to our understanding of the essay on tradition, is probably most fruitfully described in terms of its categorization, as we have already seen it categorized, of “incantatory poetry, poetry that eschews the statement and evokes the unspoken mood.” Three examples offered by Kenner may serve to explain the meaning of the category. The first is from Edward Lear:

... Where the purple river rolls fast and dim
And the Ivory Ibis starlike skim,
Wing to wing we dance around,
Stamping our feet with a flumpy sound.

The second belongs to Tennyson:

... but far away
The noise of life begins again,
And ghastly thro’ drizzling rain
On the bald street breaks the blank day.

The final sample is Eliot’s:

I grow old ... I grow old ...
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

The poetry in these examples, according to Kenner, deals in “effects, not ideas; and the effects are in an odd way wholly verbal.” Because they are wholly verbal, “they will not leave the mind, which grows bored with ideas but

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1 At the beginning of this chapter.
2 Kenner, op. cit., p. 36.
3 Ibid., p. 7. Kenner also (p. 6) offers the lines describing the women who ... come and go.
will never leave off fondling phrases.\(^1\) The example from Lear shows incantatory poetry in the hands of a man aware of what it was and of what its limitations were, aware of its ability to express feelings but not thought. The example from Tennyson shows the method as used by its greatest technical innovator prior to Eliot, the man who used it to express his feelings with perfection, even though he also often made the mistake of trying to use the method to express thought.\(^2\) (The example above, of course, illustrates his success with feeling, not his failure with thought.) The example from Eliot shows the method not only perfected, but recognised and exploited for what it is: "the phenomenon of sound obscuring deficiencies of sense from writer and reader is often to be observed in English poetry; . . . Mr. Eliot's originality consisted in allowing the deficiency to be concealed only from the speaker." Eliot, the writer, is "too cool" not to have realised what he was doing; and "as for the reader, his pleasure consists precisely in experiencing a disproportion difficult to isolate." The lines "manage to be ridiculous without being funny (the speaker is not making a joke) or cruel (a joke is not being made about the speaker.)" The technique resembles mock-heroic, "but it doesn't burlesque anything."\(^3\)

To attempt to describe what is going on in these lines, Kenner toils in the area of incantation himself:

Like a side-show mermaid, this non-sequitur of an aging Bostonian floats embalmed in dark sonorities whose cloudiness almost conceals the stitching between mammal and fish. We feel that the two halves won't conjoin at the

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 4.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 7. Tennyson and Lear borrowed the method from Coleridge.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 5.
very instant of being persuaded they do. The vowels sound very fine, the syllables are impeccably cadenced; but vaguely within one's pleasure at Tennysonian excellence there struggles an intimation of the absurd, with no more chance of winging clear into view than a wasp in a jar of molasses.¹

This method of incantatory poetry is essentially, therefore, a use, conscious or unconscious, of sound to obscure the deficiencies of sense. It secures, in the words of Miss Elizabeth Schneider's description of "Kubla Khan," "an air of meaning rather than meaning itself."² It has an extraordinary "emotional inclusiveness"³ which can give the impression of real total inclusiveness: "it contains so much that it ought to contain everything." But this impression is a false one. What is included is only the world of feelings and emotions that can be created by words. What is excluded is the world of reality and of solid thought. The incantatory world seems so all-inclusive simply because it is a closed-in world, unaware of what lies outside it. "A sphere is self-bounded because its surface is turning away at every instant from possible tangents."⁴

This "world made of words" by Coleridge and Tennyson and Lear and Swinburne obtained its coherence by "exploiting the sounds of the words and the implications concealed in their sounds; 'A cry that shivered to the tingling stars' would be a strikingly impoverished line if the English language could be suddenly purged of the words 'twinkling' and 'tinkling.'"⁵ In much the same

¹Ibid. I Personally feel that here Kenner compounds the "cloudiness."
²Quoted by Kenner, op. cit., p. 7.
³Ibid., p. 9. Kenner does not attempt to divide emotions from feelings.
⁴Ibid., p. 8. Presumably the feelings of felt thought are excluded too.
⁵Ibid.
way (even though involving no half rhymes), much of the "grotesque melancholy of
Prufrock" radiates from the protagonist's name," from its sound and the imp-
lications that sound carries, the "complex deftness" of the title itself draw-
ing in great part upon the sound and sound implications of the two syllables of
that name: "it was a surgical economy that used the marvelous name once only,
in the title, and compounded it with a fatuous 'J. Alfred'; . . . a talent al-
ready finely schooled that with nice audacity weighed in a single phrase the im-
plications of this name against those of 'Love Song'; . . . genius that sepa-
rated the speaker of the monologue from the writer of the poem by the solitary
device of affixing an unforgettable title." In the whole of the poem and in
most Eliot's best early verse, "every phrase seems composed as though the des-
tiny of the author's soul depended upon it." But the phrasing is incantation:
"it is unprofitable not to consider the phrases as arrangements of words before
considering them as anything else. Like the thousand little gestures that con-
stitute good manners, their meaning is contained in themselves alone." Eliot is
a "verbal" poet, in fact "the most verbal of the eminent poets: more verbal
than Swinburne," a poet who has "carried verbalism far beyond the mere extir-
pation of jarring consonants . . . because of his intimate understanding of what
language can do: how its 'tentacular roots,' as he said once, reach 'down to
the deepest terrors and desires.'"

In lines briefly noted previously—

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo—

1Ibid., pp. 1–5. I personally feel that Kenner is overemphasising here.
2Supra, p. 18, n. 3.
Eliot's specific method of combining incantation with a non-incantatory awareness of elements on a different and contradicting level can be seen most clearly. "The closed and open o's \( \text{sig} \), the assonances of room, women, and come, the pointed caesura before the polysyllabic burst of 'Michelangelo,' weave a context of grandeur within which our feeling about these trivial women determines itself." The sound—the "heric sound, and especially the carefully dramatized sound" of the polysyllabic name—"muffles" the women. A greater understanding of what is taking place here can be seen by comparison with a French translation of these lines:

Dans la pièce les femmes vont et viennent
En parlant des maîtres de Sienne.

The lines express the sense sufficiently and approximate the movement reasonably well. Nevertheless, this success is "strangely insufficient for lines whose poetic mechanism, one might have thought, depended on so simple a contrast of conceptions: talking women and a heroic visionary." For Eliot is dealing with conceptions "only marginally. Hence—again—the elusive disproportion from which his humor arises, a delicate vapor in whose aura the lights twinkle."¹

Kenner presents other similar experiences and effects derived from Prufrock," but the ones we have considered should be sufficient for our purpose, which has been to gain an understanding of incantatory poetry insofar as it presents an experience of the world that implies an underlying idealist metaphysics. Our next step will be to consider the one specific area of experience presented in Eliot's early poems which is the most relevant and necessary for a full understanding of "Tradition and the Individual Talent," the area of the ex-

¹Kenner, op. cit., p. 6.
periencing of "a person" and "a personality." But before passing on to this consideration, I wish to forestall an objection that might be made at this point to Kenner's fundamental assertion that Eliot's method derives from that of such poets as Coleridge, Lear, Tennyson, and Swinburne. The objection I have in mind is this: Eliot has stated (and it has now become readily accepted) that the forms of his early poetry came from Laforgue and from the later Elizabethan drama; he says nothing about their coming from the English tradition of the last century and, in fact, seems to be revolting against that tradition. The answer to this objection is offered by Kenner himself (although not by way of answering an objection, but rather by way of explaining how Laforgue and the Elizabethans fit into the general scheme of Eliot's development). Calling attention to the exact wording of Eliot's statement about his early poetry and stressing the fact that the statement was "deliberately phrased twenty years" after the writing of that poetry—"The form in which I began to write, in 1908 or 1909, was directly drawn from the study of Laforgue together with the later Elizabethan drama"—Kenner points out that Eliot speaks of his form as being drawn from the study of these writers, not from an imitation of them. "They provided the form in which he began to write, the means of disposing its entelechy, of devising ends toward which effects might be ordered; the effects themselves, the diction, the sonorous texture and the interbreeding of nuances, came in 1908 or 1909 from sources so diffuse as to be virtually anonymous, the regnant sensibility of those years." Kenner classifies Eliot's method with that of Tennyson "as one would today call much beginners' verse 'Eliotic,' without imputing detached study."\(^1\)

Having disposed of the above objection to labelling Eliot's early poetry

\(^1\)Ibid., pp. 12-13.
"Tennysonian" and "incantatory," let us now consider the view of "persons" and "personality" expressed in this poetry. Kenner begins his analysis of the "persons" in Eliot's early poetry with J. Alfred Prufrock. Prufrock, he says, is "a name plus a Voice. He isn't a 'character' cut out of the rest of the universe and equipped with a history and a little necessary context, like the speaker of a Browning monologue." We know nothing about him, not even his age. He is not an Everyman; for the various things to which he alludes—"Hesiod, Hamlet, Lazarus, Falstaff, entomology, eschatology, John the Baptist, mermaids"—isolate him from the crowd. "What 'Prufrock' is, is the name of a possible zone of consciousness where these materials can maintain a vague congruity; no more than that; certainly not a person." If you allow the "intermodulations" of these materials to "echo in your mind," you will not succeed in "deepening your apprehension of an imagined character, such as Hamlet, or discerning his boundaries; Prufrock is strangely boundless; one doesn't affirm at a given point with certainty, 'Here is where his knowledge would have stopped,' or 'These are subtleties to which he would not have aspired.'" He is a psychic presentation; "like the thing you look at when you raise your eyes from this page, he is the centre of a field of consciousness, rather yours than his: a focusing of the reader's attention, in a world made up not of cows and stones but of literary 'effects' and memories prompted by words."

Prufrock, thus described, is "the generic Eliot character." Gerontion is "one of his metamorphoses, another Voice with no ascertainable past and no particularised present: not even a shadowy apparatus of streets and stairs and rooms full of talking women, but a 'dry month' which turns out to be metaphoric

1Tbid., p. 35.
and a 'decayed house' whose tenants turn out to be the thoughts of his brain.¹

The "extreme case of the Eliotic pseudo-person," Kenner says, is Tiresias: "the most important personage in the poem," according to Eliot's note, "yet 'a mere spectator,' a congeries of effects, who is only presented personally in a footnote." He is basically nothing more than a vast, unbounded area of consciousness: "What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem; and what Tiresias is—so far as he can be said to exist for the reader—is what he sees: the whole disparate poem, ravelling out boundlessly into literary echoes and mythological traditions as old as the human race." He is simply another "name of a possible zone of consciousness where the materials with which he is credited with being aware can co-exist; and what else, we seem to hear the author ask, what else, unless a delimited shadow like 'the young man carbuncular,' can a developed human consciousness be said to be?²

This, then, is the basic vision of reality, and especially of persons and of personality, found in the early poems of Eliot. It is a vision that expresses itself, not in statements, but in a kind of incantation that attempts to evoke "the unspoken mood." Now let us look at the philosophy that Kenner asserts underlies this vision of things, the philosophy of F. H. Bradley.

Bradley seems to have interested Eliot for a longer time than has any other non-poet. Moreover, the interest began during Eliot's late twenties, the time when philosophical influence can be at its greatest. Eliot's thesis at Harvard, dated 1916, concerns Bradley.³ The same year, Eliot published an essay

¹Ibid., pp. 35-36.
²Ibid., p. 36.
³This doctoral dissertation, published in 1964, will be treated later.
In The Monist\(^1\) comparing Bradley's philosophy with that of Leibniz. In 1922 he inserted a passage from Bradley’s Appearance and Reality into the footnotes at the end of The Waste Land.\(^2\) In 1927 he wrote a review for the Times Literary Supplement\(^3\) of the reprinted Ethical Studies, a review that was extremely eulogistic.\(^4\)

Of these writings, the most important for our purposes, of course, are those written closest to the time at which "Tradition and the Individual Talent" was being thought out. "Prufrock" was completed in August, 1911,\(^5\) although it was not published until June, 1915.\(^6\) It had been preceded by "Conversation Galante," "Preludes I and II," and "Portrait of a Lady" (1909-1910) and by "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" and "Prelude III" (October, 1910-July, 1911).\(^7\) It was followed by "Prelude IV" and "La Figlia che Piange" (1911-1912),\(^8\) after


\(^5\)Ibid., p. 77.


\(^7\)Actually Eliot was engaged in work on "Prufrock" during the entire period in which he was completing these poems.

\(^8\)Kenner, loc. cit.
which Eliot produced no more poetry for three years.\(^1\) He then began his work on Bradley.\(^2\) At Oxford in 1915 he wrote six poems—"Aunt Helen," "Morning at the Window," "The Boston Evening Transcript," "Cousin Nancy," "Mr. Apollinaris," and "Hysteria"—\(^3\) poems classified together by Mr. Kenner as satires.\(^4\) These poems, it will be noted, are, therefore, composed during the time in which Eliot is engaged in writing his dissertation on Bradley. From the fall of 1915 until the end of 1916, Eliot worked as a teacher and labored on the dissertation, completing the first (and only) draft in April, 1916.\(^5\) The article comparing Bradley and Leibniz appeared in October of that year. The note from the poem The Waste Land was written quite a bit later, in 1923. (The poem appeared without annotation in The Criterion in October, 1922, and in the Dial in November of that year; the notes were added when the poem was brought out in book form.)\(^6\)

Now let us consider the philosophy of Bradley as it appears in Eliot's philosophical writing. Kenner describes Eliot's dissertation as "a closely-argued and widely-documented account and defense of Bradley's position" and asserts that it is "evidence for his unqualified ingestion of certain perspectives of Bradley's which one does not discover him ever to have repudiated."\(^7\) If emphasis is placed on the fact of Eliot's "unqualified ingestion of certain pers-

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 31.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 27. Kenner offers very useful chronologies of the works.
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 57.
\(^4\)Ibid., p. 63. Kenner points up Bradleyan implications in these also.
\(^6\)Kenner, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
\(^7\)Ibid., p. 39. The emphasis has been added.
spectives" of Bradley's, then the assertion would seem to be generally valid. The statement, however, that the dissertation is basically a "defense" of Bradley's position does not appear, to me at least, to be entirely correct. Kenner mentions that in researching for his book, he was unable to obtain access to the manuscript material in the Houghton Library at Harvard. The unpublished dissertation is in the Houghton collection. Kenner felt that this difficulty had been "largely nullified" by Mr. Robert Lowell, who helped him contact Mrs. Henry Ware Eliot, Eliot's sister-in-law, who, in turn, allowed Kenner to use the annotations and digests made of the collection by her late husband. Mr. Eliot, however, at least in my opinion, had a somewhat different purpose in writing his dissertation than his brother Henry's notes have led Kenner to believe. In the concluding chapter of the dissertation, the primary purpose of which was "merely to weave together the conclusions of the other chapters and present them if possible as a coherent whole; [Sig] and to touch as well upon certain consequences which have not as yet appeared," Eliot states that in the previous chapters "I have been compelled to reject certain theories, logical and psychological, which appear in the Principles and elsewhere," thus showing a very definite independence, at least in details, of any rigidly strict Bradleyan system. But of far greater importance than the relatively minor divergence in

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2Ibid., p. 38.
3Ibid., p. xiv. I wish to stress the secondary nature of the evidence.
5Eliot, Knowledge and Experience, p. 153.
certain areas from Bradley's positions is the following statement of Eliot concerning the conclusions reached in the dissertation: "I believe that all of the conclusions that I have reached are in substantial agreement with Appearance and Reality." He speaks of "conclusions that I have reached," conclusions that are his own, the result of his own thought and not simply a scholarly mosaic bringing together and arranging all the quotations from Bradley that relate to the question of our knowledge of "immediate experience." True, the conclusions are "in substantial agreement with Appearance and Reality"; but this agreement implies an arriving at the conclusions by Eliot on his own, after which he discovers and judges that these conclusions are either much the same as Bradley's or, at least, not in opposition to them. (I should note here in passing the importance of Appearance and Reality in Eliot's thinking: he can disagree with Principles and with other writings of Bradley, but the criterion for basic Bradleian philosophy is to be "in substantial agreement with Appearance and Reality." It is this book, furthermore, which Eliot uses in his note to The Waste Land.) For these reasons I feel that Kenner is incorrect in labelling the dissertation a defense of Bradley. It is much more than that; it is a work containing much original thinking, a work which presents not simply the philosophy of Bradley, but, more importantly, the philosophy of Eliot himself at this period. Moreover, it is not simply a record of a student's, even a doctoral candidate's, researches. The archives of Harvard University contain a carbon copy of a letter sent to Eliot by Professor J. H. Woods in which Professor Woods tells Eliot that Josiah Royce, then the highest ranking philosopher in America, had judged the

1Ibid. Eliot is referring to Francis Herbert Bradley, Appearance and Reality. A metaphysical essay (2d ed. rev.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930). The edition Eliot used, however, is now out of print. Thus the above is given.
dissertation "the work of an expert." 1 Nevertheless, although Kenner seems to be somewhat incorrect in considering the dissertation as a defense of Bradley and in speaking of an "unqualified ingestion" by Eliot of Bradley's viewpoint (there was definitely quite a bit of digestion), the basic conclusion Kenner draws from his assertion is not only not falsified by this fact but even very definitely strengthened by it. For, if my objection is well founded, then we are dealing in the dissertation not with the philosophy of Bradley, which influenced the thought of Eliot, but with what has actually been achieved as the philosophy of Eliot himself. It is drawn in great part from Bradley, but it is not a mere repetition of him. Therefore, it is a fortiori of importance in the understanding and interpretation of "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

Kenner considers the main effect of what he calls the "transient closeness of identification" between Eliot and Bradley upon Eliot's mind (and, most discernibly, upon his "poetic sensibility") to have been "an ineradicable stain on his mind . . . imparting color to all else that passes through," a "coloring, not . . . a body of doctrine." 2 This coloring is the coloring of Bradley's "deeply-thought-out metaphysical scepticism," which affects not only Eliot's poetry, but also his essays. 3 Eliot's well-known disavowal of ability to pursue abstruse thought is a case in point, as is his "ironic intimation" that others who are not quite so timid in their assertions have not yet reached the understanding of "how principles invoked in the press of practical disputation thereby run into slogans, losing what little integrity they have, that of standpoints

1Eliot, Knowledge and Experience, p. 10.
2Kenner, op. cit., p. 39. I would call it a structuring of sensibility.
3Ibid., p. 40.
in an evasive whole of perception, and how one must therefore defend practical judgments by reference to one’s impressions alone.” Finally, there is the “disarmingly hesitant and fragmentary way in which he makes a point or expresses a conviction, doubting that he is quite the man to undertake the job in hand, or devoting an entire volume to ‘notes towards the definition’ of a single word.”

Beyond these general influences of the “coloring” of Bradley upon Eliot which form the major part, according to Kenner, of the philosopher’s “influence” upon the poet-critic, there are, of course, “a few odds and ends of what the plain reader of Bradley would call Bradleyan ‘doctrines,’” even in places in such late works as Four Quartets. (I am not competent to make a judgement here, but I suspect that a more Thomistic interpretation of the passages Kenner notes from the later works may be nearer to Mr. Eliot’s intention.) Let us now examine this “coloring” and these “odds and ends of doctrine,” beginning with Kenner’s description and interpretation of them.

For Bradley, Kenner says, “memory is to perception as the pool to the ripples; the whole of Bradley’s metaphysic emanates from his denial that the dichotomy of observer and observed is anything but a late and clumsy abstraction, of limited usefulness, crassly misrepresenting the process of knowing.” Subject and object are not separate. “At any time,” writes Bradley, ‘all that we suffer, do and are forms one psychological totality; . . . is experienced all to-

1Ibid., pp. 40-41.
2Kenner is alluding to his previous statement that “it is as a coloring, not as a body of doctrine, that he stays in the mind” (Ibid., p. 39).
3Ibid., p. 41.
4Ibid., p. 42.
gether as a co-existing mass, not perceived as parted and joined even by re-
lations of coexistence; ... contains all relations, distinctions, and every ideal object that at that moment exists in the soul."¹ As Eliot puts it in his dissertation, "paraphrasing," says Kenner, "Bradley's description of 'immediate experience,'" the "experienced ... coexisting mass" spoken of just above, "'In feeling the subject and the object are one.'"²

Here it is necessary to point out, as Kenner has failed to do, that, although "Bradley used the term 'experience' and the term 'feeling' almost interchangeably, both in Appearance and in the essay 'On Our Knowledge of Immediate Experience,'"³ the term "'feeling' ... is a term of very wide application, so that in some of its quite legitimate uses it is certainly not identical with 'experience.'"⁴ It is not "the feeling of psychologists, though it is in a way continuous with psychological feeling." It is, citing Bradley, "the immediate unity of a finite psychical centre";⁵ but it is "not merely the feeling of a mind or consciousness."⁶ Again, according to Bradley, "it means for me, first, the general condition before distinctions and relations have been developed, and

¹Ibid., pp. 12-12. Kenner does not give exact references for sources.
²Ibid., p. 12.
³Eliot, Knowledge and Experience, p. 15.
⁴Ibid., pp. 15-16.
⁵Ibid., p. 16, citing Francis Herbert Bradley, Appearance and Reality (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 406. Note that I refer in this thesis to two different editions of Appearance and Reality. (Henceforth I will differentiate the two by placing the date of publication after the title.) "Inasmuch as the 1893 edition of Bradley's Appearance and Reality ... [is] out of print, Mr. Eliot's references ... have been transposed to those of the 1946," says editor Anne Bolgan (Eliot, Knowledge and Experience, p. 208). I use earlier.
⁶Eliot, Knowledge and Experience, p. 16.
where as yet neither any subject nor any object exists ... (and), in the second place, anything which is present at any stage of mental life, in so far as that is only present and simply is." Thus feeling is due to—or, perhaps better, is characterised by (for it is not "due to" in any causal sense)—"undifferentiatedness."\(^1\) (The word is mine, not Eliot's, not Bradley's. It expresses the concept involved better than "lack of differentiation" would; for the latter expression seems to involve a notion of privation, whereas the former appears, at least to me, to be devoid of such connotation.) In the second sense of feeling, the sense in which feeling is "anything which is present at any stage of mental life, in so far as that is only present and simply is," Bradley continues, "we may say that everything actual, no matter what, must be felt; but we do not call it feeling except so far as we take it as failing to be more."\(^2\) In other words, immediate experience underlies all knowledge, is a partial constituent of all knowledge. But the knowledge of, say, a dog is not itself immediate experience; it is immediate experience plus something else—immediate experience plus differentiation into "I" and "the dog I see" (that is, differentiation into subject and object), differentiation into "this part of the total object" (the dog) and "everything else" (the ground he is standing on, the air which surrounds him, and so forth), differentiation into all the other various aspects contained in an undifferentiated way in the immediate experience in question.

Having clarified this ambiguity in the meaning of the notion of "feeling," let us continue with Kenner's summary of Bradley's doctrine—or, rather, as previously noted, of his "colouring." We had just considered the position

singly out by Kenner as being the fundamental assertion of Bradley's metaphysics: that everything we do or suffer or are is experienced undividedly "as a co-existing mass," a mass which, however, contains all the distinctions, relations, and ideal objects present in the soul at the precise moment of this doing and suffering and experiencing; that this undifferentiatedness of the co-existing mass extends even to an undifferentiatedness of subject and object; that "in feeling the subject and the object are one."

Kenner's analysis of a section from Eliot's poetry will exemplify the view involved here. The selection from the poetry is the following:

Among the smoke and fog of a December afternoon
You have the scene arrange itself—as it will seem to do—
With "I have saved this afternoon for you"
And four wax candles in the darkened room,
Four rings of light upon the ceiling overhead,
An atmosphere of Juliet's tomb
Prepared for all the things to be said, or left unsaid. 1

According to Kenner, this selection—and, Kenner implies, most, if not all of T.S. Eliot's poetry—is attempting to "reproduce the quality of immediate experience." And "to reproduce the quality of immediate experience, there is expected of verse a blending suavity, not an assured rattle of subjects and predicates, nor images standing in explicable analogy to one another." In the above poem, "what seems to be a salient verb, in line 2, is virtually cancelled later in the same line; for the rest, we have participles and relative clauses related to nothing, the gestures of verbs rather than their commitments, syntax not abolished but anaesthetised." Here is a reproduction of the quality of immediate experience. "Juliet's tomb, the smoke and fog, the candles, the imminent conversation form, precisely, 'one psychical totality, experienced all to-

Bradley's view of reality can be grasped even more clearly by comparison with the view which the average person probably has, but which Bradley rejects. This common view is, as Kenner puts it, "a smartly diagrammatic view of the world,"\(^1\) a view according to which a writer in the late seventeenth century would praise "the primitive purity, and shortness, when men deliver'd so many things, almost in an equal number of words."\(^2\) This view of reality, formulated in the late seventeenth century into norms for orderly writing,\(^3\) has continued to be a predominating common-sense view down to our own day. In supposing that there should be a word for each thing, it fundamentally asserts "an atomistic view of things; they lie in great numbers opaquely before the mind, awaiting arrangement and selection." The mind that knows them is completely separate from them. "It is the busy finger that arranges and selects." It notes "identities, resemblances, and differences; . . . there is nothing else to note." The fundamental type of statement is "the equation; this fish is indistinguishable from that one; \(a = b\)." The fundamental assumption here is that "things can be clearly and distinctly separated from our continuous experience of them." From this assumption and its immediate consequences, "it is but a step . . . to the familiar assumption that a self-evident separation between me and what I experience governs all thought, or that what I experience is made up of self-evident component parts, this object and that one, actions with beginnings,

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\(^1\)Kenner, op. cit., p. 43.


\(^3\)Kenner, op. cit., pp. 43-44.
middles and ends mixed by sentences with subjects, verbs, and predicates, the
starts and stops of sentences and paragraphs corresponding to perceived
divisions in the action being chronicled."¹

It is possible, however, to assert an opposing view: that "a simple
sentence like 'Jack threw the ball to Will' imposes a symmetrical shape and
three grammatical categories upon a bit of spontaneous play."² In Bradley's
view, "At every moment my state, whatever else it is, is a whole of which I am
immediately aware, ... an experienced non-relational unity of many in one."³

The key word to which Kenner calls attention here is non-relational. "It is
Bradley's shorthand for his untiring conviction that this immediate awareness in
which my sentence (to call it 'mine') proceeds, is not reducible to parts in a
certain relation, myself confronting the exterior given, these things in this
manner related to these."⁴ Bradley puts it this way:

At any moment my actual experience, however relational its contents, is in
the end non-relational. No analysis into relations and terms can ever ex-
hhaust its nature or fail in the end to belie its essence. What analysis
leaves for ever [sic] outstanding is no mere residue, but is a vital con-
dition of the analysis itself. Everything which is got out into the form
of an object implies still the felt background against which the object
comes, and, further, the whole experience of both feeling and object is a
non-relational immediate felt unity.⁵

As Kenner observes, commenting upon the statement that "everything which is got
out into the form of an object implies still the felt background against which

¹Tbid., p. 116.
²Tbid. Kenner does very definitely make this assertion here.
⁴Kenner, loc. cit.
⁵Bradley, Appearance and Reality, cited by Kenner, loc. cit.
the object comes," "you are starting to simplify experience drastically the
minute you say 'tree.'" And you are simplifying it even more radically, per-
haps, as soon as you say "I."

This fundamental outlook of Bradley's philosophy contained implications
that would become a central part of Eliot's thought—implications about history,
about personality, and about communication. The study of Bradley gave Eliot "a
point of view towards history and so . . . the scenario for his most comprehen-
sive essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'; it freed him from the
Laforguian posture of the ironist with his back to the wall, by affirming the
artificiality of all personality including the one we intimately suppose to be
our true one; not only the faces we prepare but the 'we' that prepares; and it
released him from any notion that the art his temperament bade him practice was
an eccentric art, evading for personal and temporary reasons a more orderly,
more 'normal' unfolding from statement." All of these influences of Bradley
upon Eliot make their way eventually into "Tradition and the Individual Talent."
Let us look at each separately.

Considering first the implications of Bradley's fundamental position in
the area of history, Kenner says that "it follows from Bradley's denial of any
separation 'of feeling from the felt, or of the desired from desire, or of what
is thought from thinking,' that our attempt to separate the past from our knowl-
edge of it, what really happened from the way we imagine things to have been, is
ultimately meaningless." The further implications of this position, impli-
ations which lead directly into "Tradition and the Individual Talent," we will consider when we come to examine the meaning of that essay in the light the overall Bradleyan view of things we have been discussing. For the present, let us turn to the second major area of implications derived from Bradley's fundamental position.

This second area is that of the "person." Person is very elusive. "The usual self of one period," writes Bradley, "is not the usual self of another. It is impossible to unite in one mass these conflicting psychical contents.

For, if we attempt to do so, we run into a dilemma. Either "we accept the man's mere history as his self, and if so why call it one? Or we confine ourselves to periods, and there is no longer any single self." The past self presents even more of a problem than the present self. It "is arrived at only by a process of inference." Although each person usually tends to think of his past self as "his own," it may, in fact, be "very largely . . . foreign." For, first of all, it is "incompatible with my own present, quite as much as my present can be with another man's." Secondly, I may even be hostile to it, hate it. "It may be mine merely in the sense of a persisting incumbrance, a compulsory appendage, joined in continuity and fastened by an inference."¹

Kenner sums up what Bradley is saying here by stating that "if the present self is evasive, the past one is illusory."² This statement seems, to me at least, to be an overstatement. Bradley does not say that a man's past is totally foreign to him. He says that it "very largely may be." Furthermore, if it is "arrived at only by a process of inference," still it is arrived at. No mat-

²Kenner, loc. cit.
ter how hostile a man is to his past, no matter how much he sees it as "a persisting incumbrance, a compulsory appendage, joined in continuity and fastened by an inference," it is, nevertheless, a persisting incumbrance, a compulsory appendage; and it is joined in continuity; and it is fastened by an inference, that very inference by which alone he arrives at it: "My past self is arrived at ... by a process of inference."

Continuing now with Kenner's exposition of the Bradleyan self, let us turn now to Eliot's view of the "subjective." Another person, Eliot says, may label my view of things "subjective," nothing more than (in Kenner's words), "a merely personal appendage of 'me'; I, however, cannot call it subjective, because to call it subjective would be to separate me from it; and my experience is inseparable from the conviction that the three things my interlocutor would separate—I, the objective world, and my feelings about it, [sic] are an indissoluble whole." Only in "social behavior, ... in the conflict and readjustment of what Bradley calls 'finite centers,'" are feelings and things separated.¹

Kenner considers the meaning of "finite center" to be of less importance than the method of inquiry by which Bradley comes to it. Bradley began the inquiry by asking, "What is the real Julius Caesar?"² In order to bring into play the analysis already made of Eliot's expression, Kenner instead first asks who Prufrock is. "If you ask [Bradley] what is Mr. Prufrock's essential self, he will first discard 'essential' as implying that of which Prufrock himself is self-consciously and therefore distortedly aware; and reply at some length that the real Prufrockian focus of consciousness (he will not say the real Prufrock,

¹Ibid., p. 52.
²The phrasing of this question is Kenner's, not Bradley's.
any more than he will say the real you) is a finite centre.\(^1\) Kenner relies on Eliot, rather than on Bradley, to make the term intelligible, quoting the \textit{Monist} article on "Leibniz's Monads and Bradley's Finite Centers": "The finite Centre, so far as I can pretend to understand it, is immediate experience."\(^2\) And, since feeling, understood with the qualifications I have already pointed out, is basically the same thing as immediate experience, we may also say that the finite center is feeling.

Bradley, Kenner says, is "evasive" about the finite center. "If you look at a finite centre the gaze of your mind's eye corrupts it, or you start thinking things into it." As a result, Bradley avoids describing the finite center as such, "though he will invoke it with his own peculiar tentative confidence" in a discussion of something else. His answer to "What is the real Julius Caesar?": "Caesar's experience of himself being as inaccessible, and as irrelevant, as a geranium's experience of itself, the 'real Julius Caesar' cannot be less than—for us—every impression, every sentiment, that attracts itself to that name, and every effect that can be attributed to it," just as Prufrock "exists only while someone is reading or remembering the poem, and exists only as each particular reader experiences him."\(^3\)

Caesar and Prufrock are one thing. What about a person with whom I am

\(^1\)\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 52-53. The variations in spelling (center and centre) are Kenner's. I will use center except when quoting. Cf. n. 2 below.


\(^3\)Kenner, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 53. All the quotations in this paragraph present Kenner's words, not Bradley's. It is extremely important for our main purpose, the presentation and criticism of Kenner's interpretation of the essay on tradition, to distinguish carefully between Bradley, Eliot, and Kenner.
in direct contact at any given time? Some of the same objects "presumably" go to make up at least part of his immediate experience as go to make up mine. I myself am a part of this immediate experience of his, he of mine. Kenner handles this matter by citing Eliot's article on "Leibniz's Monads and Bradley's Finite Centers":

A self is an ideal and largely practical construction, one's own self as much as others. My self remains "intimately one thing with that finite centre within which my universe appears. Other selves...are for me ideal objects." The self is a construction in space and time. It is an object among others, and could not exist save in a common world.

The self, other selves are thus ideal objects. An object, Eliot says, is "a common intention of several souls, cut out (as in a sense are the souls themselves) from immediate experience." The rise of a world common to many souls (the rise, that is, of what we would commonly call "the world") can be described only by "admitted fictions": "Our experiences are similar because they are of the same objects"; yet "the objects are only 'intellectual constructions' out of various and quite independent experiences." Here, although Kenner does not seem to have adverted to the fact, is the context which qualifies and delimits all such statements as the one in the Waste Land notes which speak of closed and private personal worlds. This closedness and privateness is one aspect only of the total picture. Eliot puts it this way:

On the one hand, my experience is in principle essentially public. My emotions may be better understood by others than by myself; as my oculist knows my eyes. And on the other hand everything, the whole world, is pri-

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1Ibid.
2We might bring out the meaning of this word more clearly by pointing to its derivation: \textit{idea-l}.
3Kenner, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 53-54.
vate to myself. Internal and external are thus not adjectives applied to
different contents within the same world; they are different points of
view.¹

It is in this context that Eliot, citing Bradley, would say, "My external sen-
sations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts and feelings" since
in both exterior sensations and in thoughts and feelings, "my experience falls
within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements
alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it."² Thus when
Eliot cites Bradley's summation that "regarded as an existence which appears in
a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul,"³ this
statement must be understood in the same larger context of the two viewpoints
which can be adopted in dealing with experience. "The whole world for each
<soul> is peculiar and private for that soul insofar as that world is regarded
as an existence which appears in <that> soul," insofar as the world is consid-
ered from that particular point of view; it is not so absolutely. Kenner cites
both the passage given in the Waste Land notes and the passage which gives the
larger context into which that more limited passage fits, but he does not show
the connection between the two. Here I merely point to the fact of this
omission. Later I will show its implications for the interpretation of "Tra-
dition and the Individual Talent."

Besides the Bradleyan viewpoints concerning history and concerning the

¹Ibid.

²Bradley, Appearance and Reality (1893?), p. 346, cited by Eliot, The
presume that Eliot referred in his notes following the poem to the same edition
that he used in writing his dissertation.

person, or self, which we have just considered, Bradley's philosophy has important implications in the area of communication, especially in the area of the writing of poetry. According to Kenner, Bradley's philosophy would make the purpose of poetry consist in an attempt to "reproduce the quality of immediate experience." ¹ "Sensibility," he says, "is Eliot's term for a scrupulous responsiveness to the Bradleyan 'immediate experience': a responsiveness that precedes, underlies, and contains any degree of analysis." ² He interprets Eliot's statement that "language in a healthy state presents the object, is so close to the object that the two are identified" ³ as meaning that language should "mine . . . the inclusiveness and continuity [and] the felt truth of immediate experience." ⁴

One final position of Bradley's philosophy will serve to complete our consideration of the philosophical background relevant to "Tradition and the Individual Talent." It is given in a statement by Bradley concerning philosophy and, incidently so, concerning poetry. There may or may not be progress, Bradley says; but there is definitely change. "And the changed minds of each generation will require a difference in what has to satisfy their intellect. Hence there seems as much need for new philosophy as for new poetry." The new in either case is "usually much inferior to something already in existence; and

¹Kenner, op. cit., p. 43.

²Ibid., p. 46. I very definitely question the correctness of these statements. My reasons for doing so will be presented later when I take up formally a critique of Kenner's position.


⁴Kenner, loc. cit.
yet it answers a purpose if it appeals more personally to the reader." The value of works of philosophy or of poetry is, in some sense, relative: "What is really worse may serve better to promote, in certain respects and in a certain generation, the exercise of our best functions." ¹

There are other aspects of Bradley's philosophy upon which Kenner touches; but only those which we have considered have real bearing, as far as I can judge, upon the interpretation of "Tradition and the Individual Talent." The others are important to Kenner's major aim of explicating Eliot's personal invisibility as seen (or not seen) in his poetry, but they are not necessary for our purpose of understanding the essay. Therefore, let us turn now to the direct consideration of Kenner's position concerning "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

Except for a brief four-page treatment of the essay, Kenner's remarks concerning it are scattered throughout his book. I will bring them together here in a running commentary which will follow, as much as possible, the order of the essay itself, just as I have arranged the various statements concerning Bradley's philosophy in an order aimed at giving an overview of the philosophical background strictly pertinent to an understanding of the essay.

Kenner prefaces his treatment of the essay by locating it, together with "Rhetoric and Poetic Drama," as the "more or less definitive summations" of his previous critical work, ² most of which had consisted of individual book reviews in the course of which he achieved a profound reexamination of the various as-

¹ Bradley, Appearance and Reality, cited by Kenner, op. cit., p. 41.
² Kenner, op. cit., p. 99.
pects of the English literary tradition. The essay, Kenner says, should not be considered Eliot's "theory of poetry." It is, rather, a "meditation" on the relation between the old and the new, summarizing observations and judgments made in passing in other places. Written for The Egotist, whose readers had a bias in favor of the new, its particular slant emphasizes, as had previous Eliot articles in that publication, the need for a more systematic consideration of the past. Its tone includes a certain "lecture-room decor," both because it is one of the rare Eliot contributions which were not book reviews and because of implication and parody of "the superbly Holmesian 'I invite you to consider'" near the conclusion of the opening installment. ("At this moment, as it were," Kenner chuckles, "the bell rang; and the readers of The Egotist were left to gnaw their knuckles for two months.")2 This tone, as well as the various emphases in the essay, must be seen in relation to the "revolutionary" bent of Egotist readers. Had Eliot written the articles for The Athenaeum, the readers of which were "comfortable with the old," he would have stressed the need for them to examine the tradition they thought wrongly they already possessed.3

The essay begins by attempting to pinpoint and then counter a misapprehension of the meaning of "tradition," a notion, described two years earlier by Eliot in The Egotist, according to which tradition constitutes "all the ideas, beliefs, modes of feeling and behaviour which we have no time or inclination to investigate for ourselves" and simply "take second-hand."4 Tradition, however,

1Ibid., pp. 81-82.
2Ibid., pp. 99-100. The essay had two parts. Cf. Gallup, op. cit., p. 85
4Ibid., p. 100, citing Eliot.
is precisely the opposite. (The pointing up of the direct contrast is Kenner’s.) It is "not a bin into which you relegate what you cannot be bothered to examine, but precisely that portion of the past, and only that, which you have examined scrupulously."¹ So Kenner interprets "Tradition . . . cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor,"² adding that "you cannot admire, you cannot learn from, you cannot even rebel against what you do not know."³

"If you want [tradition] you must obtain it by great labor. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense," said Eliot.⁴ For Kenner this statement means that "to obtain [tradition] both requires and nourishes (Eliot’s portmanteau-word is ‘involves’) the historical sense."⁵ (Perhaps there is a slight misinterpretation involved regarding the antecedent of It, but the misinterpretation is slight and does not affect the basic meaning.)⁶

"The historical sense," Eliot continues, "compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order."⁷ Here is

¹Kenner, loc. cit.
³Kenner, loc. cit.
⁴Eliot, loc. cit. I repeat the entire statement because of what follows.
⁵Kenner, loc. cit.
⁶I would take It as referring to the previous it, which refers, in turn, to Tradition.
⁷Eliot, loc. cit.
the heart of the Bradleyan view of history. "Bradley's mind lies behind that sentence; what does not exist now, does not exist." ¹ Granting Bradley's refusal to recognize any separation "of feeling from the felt, or of the desired from desire, or of what is thought from thinking,"² then any "attempt to separate the past from our knowledge of it, what really happened from the way we imagine things to have been, is ultimately meaningless."³ In his dissertation Eliot says that a geologist attempting to imagine and to describe how the world developed must describe this development "as it would have looked had he, with his body and nervous system been there to see it." Therefore, "we cannot conceive of a past indifferent to us; obversely, that all we know of the past is part of our experience now."¹ In other words, "the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show."⁵ Any attempts, for example, to reconstruct Shakespeare's plays in the form in which they existed in his lifetime always remain "twentieth-century fictions, built out of our experience now with the aid of our present sensibilities: sensibilities which, unlike those of Shakespeare's contemporaries, have encountered, say, Shelley."⁶ Thus "the past is altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past."⁷ For "a book is a set of words; it is

²Ibid., p. 49, citing Bradley. Immediate experience is a unity.
³Kenner, loc. cit.
⁴Ibid., p. 50. The quotation is from Kenner, not Eliot.
we who give them life; and it is our life that we give them." As we read any author, we make him become "a more or less alien contemporary," a "contemporary whose own sense of the past is imperfect compared to ours. The author of Hamlet is by definition a poet who has never heard of Pope or Byron, who has read nothing published subsequent to 1601."¹ Thus Eliot's statement: "Some one said 'The dead writers are remote from us because we know so much more than they did! Precisely, and they are that which we know."² And even when they were living these dead writers were not stable and unmoving entities. "Shakespeare—let alone 'the Elizabethan drama'—is not a fixed point, for the Shakespeare who wrote Romeo and Juliet was not the Shakespeare we think of, but a Shakespeare who had not written Hamlet."³ "What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it."⁴ "The new work is not simply the latest in a series, it alters (like a new chair in the living room) the value of every other item."⁵ And it alters not only the value of these other items, but the very items themselves; "and this is because works of literary art have, except as paper and ink, no unequivocal objective existence; they exist as they are experienced, and the sensibility that has experienced novelty becomes an altered sensibility."⁶

¹Kenner, op. cit., pp. 50-51.
³Kenner, loc. cit.
⁵Kenner, loc. cit. The emphasis is mine. I wish to stress the double alteration, of values and of realities.
⁶Ibid.
For, in Bradley's words, "the past and future vary, and they have to vary, with the changes of the present, and to any man whose eyes are open, such variation is no mere theory but is plain fact."¹ When Eliot says that "for order to persist after the subvention of novelty, the whole existing order of European literature must be, if ever so slightly, altered,"² he means, according to Kenner, that "as we change, so does the literature of the past change; we cannot read the Shakespeare Dr. Johnson read."³ The change in the literature is fundamentally a change in the sensibility of the readers. The Great Gatsby, Kenner says, describes "a valley of ashes, a 'gray land' above which brood 'the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg blue and gigantic, their retinas one yard high.'" "The Hollow Men," having been completed before The Great Gatsby, Eliot could not possibly have derived the images in his poem from the book. "Nevertheless The Hollow Men appropriates the valley of ashes and the eyes of Doctor Eckleburg once the two works have entered the same consciousness, and become members of our present, which is an awareness of things that were never aware of each other."⁴

"The existing monuments," Eliot continues, "form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them."⁵ The use of the term monuments, Kenner suggests, is


²Eliot, loc. cit.

³Kenner, op. cit., p. 42. This is one of several examples offered.

⁴Ibid., p. 50. Kenner normally uses italics for these poems.

intended, in part, to avoid a discussion of precisely how literature exists and, in part, to "maintain the curator's tone with which we detect him amusing himself throughout the essay." Kenner finds Eliot's statement a "charmingly comic sentence, its terminology exactly mimicking that of The Times, evoking the busts of the poets and the commonplaces with which 'England puts her Great Writers away securely in a Safe Deposit Vault, and curls to sleep like Fafnir.'"\(^1\)

Kenner interprets Eliot's statement that "art never improves, but . . . the material of art is never quite the same"\(^2\) as a clear example of a clearly Bradleyan "doctrine" in Eliot's writing.\(^3\) We have seen the pertinent passage from Bradley already. According to Bradley, there may be or there may not be "progress," but there is always "change; and the changed minds of each generation will require a difference in what has to satisfy their intellect." Thus we need both a "new philosophy" and a "new poetry." In both the new philosophy and the new poetry, "the fresh production is usually inferior to something already in existence; and yet it answers a purpose if it appeals more personally to the reader." For both philosophy and art have a certain quasi-pragmatic relativity of value: "What is really worse may serve better to promote, in certain respects and in a certain generation, the exercise of our best functions."\(^4\)

Kenner warns that "assaying this for traces of irony presents a characteristic difficulty; . . . its most Bradleyan qualities lie less in its direct

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\(^1\)Kenner, loc. cit.

\(^2\)Eliot, loc. cit., p. 15, cited by Kenner, op. cit., p. 111. The poet "must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art . . . ." (Eliot, loc. cit.)

\(^3\)Kenner, loc. cit.

\(^4\)Bradley, Appearance and Reality, cited by Kenner, op. cit., p. 111.
frontal claim than in its more elusive implications."\(^1\) Its implications as far as Eliot's statement about art is concerned are not explicated in detail by Mr. Kenner, but perhaps we can make some conjecture as to what Kenner's interpretation might be. The "material of art," which "is never quite the same," would seem to be identical with "the passions which are \(\text{the mind's material}\)" in its "catalyst" task of creating a poem (as expounded in the second part of Eliot's essay).\(^2\) This material is a twofold material. "The elements which enter the presence of the transforming catalyst are of two kinds: emotions and feelings."\(^3\) Thus it would seem that emotions and feelings are the "materials of art" which are "never quite the same." Just as each generation reveals "changed minds," as Bradley puts it, so also each generation reveals changed emotions and feelings. Just as its way of structuring appearance through ideas changes, so also does its way of reacting and feeling. In fact, putting together two statements made separately by Kenner, we may even conclude to an interaction between the changed minds and the changed emotions-feelings. For a philosopher like Bradley (who corresponds to the changing minds) is "an experience, like the taste of nectarines or the style of Henry James, ... a vivid dream in that, as Eliot said, he modifies the sensibility."\(^4\) On the other hand, a person like Eliot may take on and develop a "sense of poetry, of personality, and of history ... all congruent with" another man's philosophy precisely because he finds

\(^1\) Kenner, loc. cit.

\(^2\) Eliot, loc. cit., p. 18. I do not guarantee, however, that Mr. Kenner would appreciate the "solemnity" of this interpretation (Kenner, op. cit., p. 99).

\(^3\) Eliot, loc. cit.

\(^4\) Kenner, op. cit., p. 51. The emphasis is mine, not Kenner's.
that philosophy "congenial" to his own pre-existing sensibilities. One of Eliot's most famous literary "doctrines," in fact, involves itself with this precise interplay between idea and sensibility, thought and feeling; and Kenner traces the doctrine straight to Bradley. Eliot, speaking of Jonson and Chapman, says that "their mode of feeling was directly and freshly altered by their reading and thought," that Tennyson and Browning fall short because "they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose" (implying, of course, that a good poet should so feel his thought), that Shelley similarly "incorporated his erudition into his writing, but not into his sensibility" (again implying that a poet should incorporate his feeling into his sensibility). ""Sensibility," says Kenner, "is Eliot's term for a scrupulous responsiveness to the Bradleyan 'immediate experience': a responsiveness that precedes, underlies, and contains any degree of analysis." (If I understand correctly what Kenner means by "responsiveness to immediate experience," I will have to say that he is very seriously misunderstanding Eliot's notion of immediate experience; but I will postpone the discussion of this issue until I take up my general critique of Kenner's position.) According to Kenner's interpretation, a poet who "incorporates his erudition... into his sensibility" (as a poet with a unified sensibility should) incorporates this erudition, this "reading and thought," into his "responsiveness to immediate experience." The responsiveness into which he

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1 Ibid., p. 49. The emphasis is mine.
2 Ibid., p. 46, citing Eliot. The emphases in the quotation are mine.
3 Kenner, loc. cit. The words are Kenner's, not Mr. Eliot's. The emphases are mine.
4 Ibid.
incorporates this reading and thought "precedes, underlies, and contains any degree of analysis" of immediate experience. Thus the reading and thought alter the response to immediate experience (a fact which makes it difficult, for me at least, to see why Kenner calls this response, this responsiveness to immediate experience, a "scrupulous responsiveness," "scrupulous" implying, I should think, an attempted purity of response to immediate experience itself untainted by any structuring of previous reading and thought—but again the problem involved here seems to spring from Kenner's interpretation of immediate experience and can wait until later for a solution). So, as we just said, the poet's reading and thought should alter his response to immediate experience. Now, since Eliot states that the poet's reading and thought should alter his "mode of feeling" and since this statement seems simply to repeat the previous one in different words, it would seem that the poet's "response to immediate experience" and his "mode of feeling" are one and the same thing. (I have a purpose in pointing out this seemingly obvious fact: recall the ambiguity, insisted upon previously, of Kenner's assertion that "feeling," for Bradley and Eliot, equals "immediate experience"; quite obviously here, however, the two could not by synonymous or we would be making the ridiculous statement that a person's "mode of feeling" is his "response to feeling." ) So the poet's reading and thinking should alter his response to immediate experience, should alter his mode of feeling immediate experience. Thus the statement that the poet should "feel [his] thought as immediately as the odour of a rose" suggests that his feeling should be to his thought as his feeling should be to his immediate experience. There seems, how-

1n "In feeling the subject and object are one," states Eliot flatly . . . paraphrasing Bradley's description of 'immediate experience.'" (Ibid., p. 142.)
ever to be a difference. His immediate experience seems to be (for Kenner) the object, or an object, of his feeling; but his thought, at least in its explicit form qua thought, does not seem to be such a direct object of his feeling. He does feel his thought as directly ("immediately") as he does the odor of a rose; but he does so not by a direct focusing of feeling upon the isolated thought as such, but simply in virtue of his having incorporated that thought into his sensibility, simply in virtue of his having allowed that thought to alter his mode of feeling (to alter, that is, his mode of feeling something else, something other than the thought itself), simply in virtue of his having allowed that thought to alter the character of his responsiveness to immediate experience. At least this is the sense in which the statement that the poet should "feel thought as immediately as the odour of a rose" seems to be most easily reconciled and connected with the statements that he should "incorporate erudition into sensibility" and that he should allow his "mode of feeling to be directly and freshly altered by reading and thought."

This Eliot thesis attacking the "dissociation of sensibility" is shown by Kenner to be intimately connected with the heart of the Bradleyan view of things. "Romantic poetry had postulated a special world because the normal one had been usurped by an orderliness which was profoundly sensed to be wrong, but which in the absence of systematic grounds for that uneasy sense could only be ignored." This Romantic poetry created its own world, a world from which thought was excluded "as a merely calculated schematizing." "In the prose world," on the other hand, "feeling was nascent or disorderly thought, something

1 Kenner, op. cit., p. 45. Eliot saw what was unconsciously implied.
2 Ibid., p. 46.
to be burnished away.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 45-46.} This creation of two separate worlds lies as the basis of the "dissociation of sensibility."\footnote{Ibid., p. 46. Cp. Eliot's description of how falling in love and reading Spinoza can fuse into a poem ("The Metaphysical Poets," \textit{Selected Essays}, p. 287).} The separate world of poetry was formed by a "vocabulary of poetic effects out of which Tennyson and Swinburne, Verlaine and Poe, brewed a phantasmagoria of nuances." Eliot, however, saw these two worlds of thought and poetry, saw the postulation of the special world of poetry as being due to a usurpation of the normal one by orderliness; but he also saw what he considered to be solid, systematic grounds for labelling and denouncing the usurpation.\footnote{Kenner, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 45.} The orderliness, the schematizing did not exhaust in reality; on the other hand, they were a part of reality, not to be excluded from it. "My actual experience," in Bradley's words, "however relational its contents, is in the end non-relational." The ordering, the schematizing is an "analysis into relations and terms" which can never "exhaust its nature [the nature, that is, of 'my actual experience at any moment'] or fail in the end to belie its essence; an analysis which of its very nature as analysis "leaves for over outstanding ... no mere residue, but ... a vital condition of the analysis itself."

This condition consists in the object's coming against a "felt background" with which it is experienced as one: "Everything which is got out into the form of an object implies still the felt background against which the object comes, and, further, the whole experience of both feeling and object is a
non-relational immediate felt unity.\(^1\) Thus the "liotic unity of thought and sensibility, the "unification" of sensibility is basically the Bradleyan non-relational felt unity of object and feeling. Given this view of the real world, Eliot could "ally the realities of everyday experience," as Kenner puts it, "with the vocabulary of poetic effects out of which Tennyson and Swinburne, Verlaine and Poe, brewed a phantasmagoria of mances."\(^2\) Given the systematic justification of Bradleyan philosophy, incantatory poetry no longer needs to build itself a separate world free from thought; for it fits the real world just as it is.

Whether this explanation of the "dissociation of sensibility" is entirely correct or not and whether it accurately represents all the implications of Kenner's interpretation of it or not, it will still suffice for our main purpose of illuminating the statement that "art never improves, but . . . the material of art is never quite the same." The materials of art are, as we have seen, emotions and feelings (however those words are understood) and, we may add now, the thoughts which modify these emotions and feelings. Since these materials change and since the kind of art that will satisfy changing people must itself change, art itself will always be changing, though never with any necessity of improvement. And, as we have just seen, this entire view of art is traceable in great part to Bradley.

Having concluded his summary of tradition, Kenner passes on to a discussion of the individual talent. The poet who understands the mutual relation-

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\(^1\) Ibid., citing Bradley. Again I stress that this is Kenner's interpretation of Bradley.

\(^2\) Kenner, loc. cit.
ship between the past and the present, Eliot says, "will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities." Kenner catalogues these responsibilities as responsibilities to the poet himself, to "the dead poets his ancestors," and to "the readers in cooperation with whom he is engaged in keeping viable traditions alive." His responsibility to himself "is the responsibility of digesting whatever nutriment the past affords him; for 'not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.'" This need of the poet for the past is explained in rather great detail by Kenner in his account of Eliot's own development as a poet. "The critical preoccupation of Eliot the poet may be summed up in this way: of the possible unwritten poems, to write the right ones." It is possible for a man to produce accidentally a piece of poetry able to give deep "satisfaction to a sensibility not yet developed, not to be developed for another two centuries." The poet, trying to assess the value of his work, may or may not be pleased by it. (Most likely, since we incline to like our own productions, he will consider it an "attractive novelty.") In this situation, the poet's "success—anticipating the canons of a posterity which has not arrived—is of no use to the poet who achieves it now; because, answering to no criteria he can grasp, it contains no indications accessible to him respecting what he next proposes to write." He is thus only able to "experiment," but not to "develop." "To develop is to understand enough of your own past achievement to go on with it; to see what has so far been done by


2Kenner, loc. cit.
yourself and by others, your predecessors and contemporaries; and a young poet in 1917 can only see what the most alert 1917 eyes are sensitized to.\(^1\)

It is this context in which Eliot's emphasis on tradition is formed, Kenner continues. "Tradition is simply what has been done, so far as we can understand it."\(^2\) This "what has been done, so far as we can understand it" is Kenner's equivalent for "the present moment of the past" in which the poet is "conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living."\(^3\) It is in terms of the depth of our understanding and appreciation of "what already exists" that we must measure our preparation to understand and appreciate "what we ourselves do." We do what we do without knowing how; and "unless we understand it when we have done it: understand, that is, not what brought our own words into being (impossible), but how, once in being, they relate to what already exists, we have no means of going on, of doing anything but wait for another piece of luck which we may not recognize when it has happened."\(^4\) This understanding how "our own words... relate to what already exists" is Kenner's expression of Eliot's "significance," or "meaning," or "appreciation":

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.\(^5\)

Such is the poet's responsibility to himself, a responsibility bound up

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 92.

\(^2\)Ibid. This passage was primarily concerned with Eliot's critical development.

\(^3\)Eliot, loc. cit., p. 22.

\(^4\)Kenner, loc. cit. Note the emphasis on the poet's needs qua poet.

\(^5\)Eliot, loc. cit., p. 15.
with the fact that "the historical sense" is "nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year,"¹ a responsibility bound up with the fact that "not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."² His responsibility to the dead poets is not explained in detail by Kenner, but is more or less obvious in the fact of his "capacities for modifying the past"³ and in the implications of that fact. His responsibility to his readers is seen in the light of his cooperative engagement with them "in keeping viable traditions alive."⁴

"What happens," says Eliot, is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.⁵ "For," as Kenner comments, "a poet's or anybody else's personality (here Bradley asserts himself vigorously) is a working fiction, that provisional management of desires, perceptions, and memories, the prepared face with which he confronts the faces that he meets." This "personality" is not to be confused with "what Eliot elsewhere calls his temperament, that volitional identity which alone confers intensity, confers interest."⁶ (There are critics who interpret the whole theory

¹Ibid., p. 11.
²Ibid., cited by Kenner, op. cit., p. 102. Notice that Eliot says "may be," not necessarily are.
⁴Ibid., p. 102. Recall the particular audience of the Egotist.
⁶Kenner, loc. cit.
of impersonality precisely in terms of what Kenner is here distinguishing as "temperament." 1 The example of George Wyndham, Kenner suggests, will illustrate the difference:

George Wyndham had an arresting personality; his energies were invested in his personality, and the world was an adventure of himself. But he was not, and indeed for that reason was not, "a finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations"; precisely because his feelings were not at liberty; they were all turned one way by the magnetism of the personality to which they adhered. Wyndham's gestures of enthusiasm were, however generous, predictable. 2

It is extremely important to recognize this fundamental contribution of Kenner to the interpretation of "Tradition and the Individual Talent": that in this essay Eliot is not speaking of "personality" according to the common-sense understanding of that idea, that he understands it, rather, in terms of the pragmatic Bradleyan construct of a personality.

Kenner offers several examples to show why it is not necessary for a poet to have felt greatly in order to write a great poem:

The death of Edward King was the occasion for a great deal that Milton had in him, in suspension, to combine and enter articulation; but the intensity of Lycidas is not the intensity of Milton's mourning for King. And among the elements that entered into the precipitate called Lycidas was Milton's indignation concerning 'our corrupted clergy, then at their height'; but this indignation, when later propelled by Milton's personality, issued not a second time as poetry, but as the baroque rant of the ecclesiastical pamphlets. 3

In other words, precisely when Milton put his personality (his pragmatic and provisional way of managing his "desires, perceptions, and memories") out of the way so that his emotions and feelings might be free to maneuver disinterestedly,

1 Francis R. Leavis, "T.S. Eliot's Stature as a Critic," Commentary, XXVI (November, 1958), pp. 399-405, serves as an example of this mistake.

2 Kenner, loc. cit. Note that personality is dynamic, even if "fiction."

3 Ibid., pp. 102-103.
precisely then did he achieve great poetry. "The more perfect the artist"—and
the Milton of Lycidas is an artist of considerable stature—"the more completely
separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more
perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its materi-
al."
In fact, Kenner adds, Eliot insists elsewhere that the artist should be
interested in his own emotions only as material, "material which he must accept
—not virtues to be enlarged or vices to be diminished."

This account of art has often been wrongly understood:

This whole account has been censured as attributing to the poet an inhuman
repose; which censure misses the crucial point, that the repose—precisely,
inhuman—exists not in the poet but in the poem. In the poem the emotion
"is 'there,' cold and indifferent." Whatever turmoil the poet may be in,
his job is not to infect us with his turmoil.
His job is to explicate turmoil . . . .

Another similar criticism of the essay, that it gives a very insufficient pic-
ture of the place of creative imagination in poetry, is based on a failure to
see the essay in its context, The Egotist, a publication with many readers who
were "infatuated with dissidence, novelty, new styles." The same may be said
for those criticisms, such as that of Leavis, which attack the theory of imper-
sonality without realizing that it is only a partial exposition of Eliot's "the-
ory of poetry," leaving out as it does all that Eliot's readers could be supposed
to be overemphasizing already.

1Tbid., p. 103, citing Eliot, loc. cit., p. 18.
2Kenner, loc. cit., citing Eliot.
3Kenner, loc. cit.
4Tbid., p. 99.
5Tbid., p. 93.
I have already brought attention to many individual objections that I have to Kenner's interpretation of Bradley's and Eliot's philosophies and of the essay on tradition in particular. Here I wish to consider several general areas in which it ought to be further explicated or in which it ought to be qualified and corrected.

The first such area is that of the interpretation of "immediate experience." Kenner describes Eliot's view of the task of poetry in terms of immediate experience: poetry (Eliot's, at least) attempts to "reproduce the quality of immediate experience."\(^1\) This notion of poetry presented by Kenner would seem, to me at least, to suggest that Eliot comes into contact (cognitive contact of some sort) with immediate experience, then attempts to "reproduce" this immediate experience in poetry. Immediate experience, this is to say, is in some sense an object first of his knowledge, then of his expression. It might be argued that Kenner does not really assert that (according to Eliot) we know immediate experience nor that the poem expresses it, since he says that the poem attempts to "reproduce the quality of immediate experience." But when he analyzes the beginning of "Portrait of a Lady" by saying that "Juliet's tomb, the smoke and fog, the candles, the imminent conversation form, precisely, 'one psy-

\(^1\text{Kenner, op. cit., p. 43. Cp. supra, p. 34.}\)
chical totality, experienced all together as a co-existing mass,"¹ Kenner is asserting, precisely, that the elements of this section of the poem "form, precisely" an immediate experience. (I, of course, do not see Kenner as implying that such poems transcribe or record actual immediate experiences. What are presented, can be, most often are, and in Eliot—according to Kenner—nearly always are fictional immediate experiences—so that Kenner speaks of the reproduction of the quality of immediate experience, not of the reproduction of an immediate experience. But what are reproduced are immediate experiences, even though they be fictional ones.) Kenner's use of the phrase "to reproduce the quality of immediate experience" certainly seems to imply that the poet has cognition of immediate experience, that he is aware of the "quality" this immediate experience has, and that he "re-presents" this quality in his writing. That Kenner definitely does mean to imply this is clear from his statement that the poet's all-important "sensibility" is Eliot's term for a scrupulous responsiveness to the Bradleyan 'immediate experience': a responsiveness that precedes, underlies, and contains any degree of analysis.² Immediate experience is presented as something to which the poet "responds." Obviously he responds only to that which he confronts, or which confronts him. Just as obviously he confronts and is confronted by something which has entered into his cognition.³ He must know immediate experience, perceive it, be open to it if he is to "respond scrupulously" to it. It is this knowledge of, this taking in of immediate expe-


²Kenner, op. cit., p. 46. Cp. supra, p. 43.

³It is necessary to explain the situation in terms of a subject-object confrontation even though such a division (in the context of this philosophy) presents only a partial and abstract view of the true situation.
rience that must be what "precedes, underlies, and contains any degree of analy-

sis" of the elements contained implicitly in that immediate experience.

If I am, therefore, correct in understanding Kenner to speak of a direct
knowledge of immediate experience by the poet, a cognition of it as a direct
object of knowledge which can be somehow reproduced in poetry, then I must assert
that Mr. Kenner has very seriously misinterpreted Eliot's notion of immediate
experience. For Eliot says very directly and explicitly that "we cannot know
immediate experience directly as an object"; there is no "element in our
experience that we can single out as immediate." We do not come upon immediate
experience as something we know directly; we ... arrive at it by inference.
Although "we can to a certain extent make an object of it," it is only as the
kind of object that is reached at the end of a train of abstract philosophical
reasoning (in much the same way that God is the object of the knowledge obtained
through Scholastic natural theology unsupplemented by other knowledge sources).
"Immediate experience ... is a timeless unity which is not as such present
either anywhere or to anyone." In fact, it is precisely "by the failure of any
experience to be merely immediate ... [that] we find ourselves as conscious
souls in a world of objects." Immediate experience is definitely not (as
Kenner appears to me to make it) "a sort of panorama passing before a review-

1Eliot, Knowledge and Experience, p. 19. Of course, we can indirectly.
2Ibid., p. 18.
3Ibid., p. 19. The statement that follows this quotation is my attempt
to interpret its meaning. Eliot does not explicitate.
4Ibid., p. 31.
It is not "an adjective of a subject" ("my experience," "your experience"). Nor does it equal "sensation." Nor is it "consciousness" (in the sense of awareness). Experience is wider than consciousness; consciousness is that part of experience of which we are aware. Immediate experience, to use Bradley's description, has a double aspect:

It means for me, first, the general condition before distinctions and relations have been developed, and where as yet neither any subject nor object exists. And it means, in the second place, anything which is present at any stage of mental life, in so far as it is only present and simply is. In this latter sense we may say that everything actual, no matter what, must be felt [experienced]; . . . we . . . call it feeling [Immediate experience] . . . so far as we take it as failing to be more. It "remains at the bottom throughout as fundamental"; but there is no stage of mental life, even the most primitive, in which it is found isolated (except, of course, by philosophical abstraction, as in the first part of the above quotation): "Whether there is a stage at which experience is merely immediate, Bradley says, we have agreed to leave doubtful. But here, I feel sure, . . . we may assert positively that there is indeed no such stage." In fact, merely immediate experience, for Eliot, if not for Bradley, is simply a hypothetical concept used for the sake of its practical helpfulness:

If anyone object that mere experience at the beginning and complete experience at the end are hypothetical limits, I can say not a word in refutation for this would be just the reverse side of what opinions I hold. And if anyone assert that immediate experience, at either the beginning or the

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1 Ibid., p. 15.
2 Ibid., p. 28. We are not aware of experience as such.
5 Eliot, loc. cit.
end of our journey, is annihilation and utter night, I cordially agree.¹

There is a sense, however, in which we may correctly, using the proper qualifications, speak of a "scrupulous responsiveness to immediate experience" and even of an attempt to "reproduce the quality of immediate experience."

First let us distinguish "feeling" (which is the same as "immediate experience") from "feelings." "Feeling" is "merely felt (i.e., I am not conscious of it)."² "Feelings" are what we would expect them to be, both from the common-sense and from the psychologists' use of the term;³ and they include such things as "a toothache, or a violent passion."⁴ Feelings are "real objects in a world of objects";⁵ that is, we are conscious of them, possess them as more or less defined objects of knowledge. Feeling is "a that, merely there; [sic] although strictly speaking not anywhere nor at any time."⁶ It is the "aspect of mere existence, in all objects as well as feelings," the "aspect of immediacy, of bare existence" which "is a character of even the most restricted feelings, though they may be at every moment the object of consciousness as well."⁷ A feeling, like any other object, "stands out . . . against a background of experience [Feeling]."⁸ Considering, therefore, the transition by which a feeling rises out of feeling, we can ask, as Eliot does, "to what extent can we say that identity persists in such a change: to what extent may we say that the felt [non-conscious] feeling and the observed feeling are the same?"⁹ Eliot's answer:

There is, between the felt and the objectified feeling, a continuity which is not interrupted by any objective difference; and so far as there is no perceived

¹Ibid., p. 31  ²Ibid., p. 24  ³ Ibid., p. 22  ⁴ Ibid., p. 23
⁵Ibid., p. 22  ⁶ Ibid., p. 23  ⁷ Ibid., p. 24  ⁸ Ibid., p. 25
difference we may assume the two to be the same."¹ His argumentation:

To say that we have no knowledge of . . . feeling and the transition from the merely felt to the objectified would be . . . a vagary. The transition is not saltatory. It is neither wholly unconscious nor capricious, but is more or less a willed change. The attention to the feeling presupposes that there is such an object present, and that the attention has not manufactured the object . . . So that in attending to a sensation or feeling any change of which we are aware besides the change felt in attending may be attributed to the sensation or feeling and held to be independent of the attention; and if we are aware of no other change than the attention, we may consider that any other change is meaningless.²

Therefore, since the felt and the objectified feeling are the same, we can, by knowing the objectified feeling, know indirectly the felt feeling. To this degree, therefore, we can know immediate experience, or feeling. To this degree we can give a "scrupulous responsiveness" to immediate experience. To this degree the poet can attempt to "reproduce the quality of immediate experience." But it must not be forgotten that the feelings we have objectified mirror only part of feeling. Furthermore, "the feeling which is an object is feeling shrunk and impoverished . . . because it is now the object of consciousness, narrowed instead of wider than consciousness," even though it is also "expanded and developed . . . because in becoming an object it has developed relations which lead it beyond itself."³

This carefully limited notion of responsiveness to immediate experience and of the reproduction of its quality, however, does not seem to be the notion that Kenner has in mind. For, when he asserts that Eliot's ideal language should "mime . . . the inclusiveness and continuity [and] the felt truth of immediate experience,"⁴ he gives no indication that "felt truth" is anything but

what we would presume the term to mean, whereas it means the precise opposite: non-consciously felt truth.¹

The second general area in which Kenner's interpretation of Eliot seems to need qualification is that of the person–community relationship. He overemphasizes the private to the detriment of the public,² the "subject side of experience" (Eliot's term) to the detriment of the object side, seemingly unaware of Eliot's warning that "we can only discuss experience from one side and then from the other, correcting these partial views . . . if we are to discuss Bradley's use of such terms as 'feeling,' 'psychical' or 'spiritual,' all of which seem to emphasize the subject side of experience." In order to express ourselves, "we are forced to use terms drawn out of [experience], to handle it as an adjective of either subject or object side, as my experience, or as the experienced world." But if we speak bluntly of "my experience" or of experience as "made of that . . . flatness, brownness, heaviness, or what not," [sic] we have been in either case guilty of importing meanings which hold good only within experience." We must refuse, "except in the most provisional way, to speak of my experience, since the I is a construction out of experience, an abstraction from it."³

Kenner's overemphasis of the subjective side of experience is closely linked with his overemphasis of the private and personal viewpoint in contrast with the public, community viewpoint. He does mention (by way of a whimsical

¹It is "non-conscious," not "unconscious." Eliot is very specific (Knowledge and Experience, pp. 28–29) concerning this point.
²Cp. supra, pp. 40–42, for an example of what I mean.
³Eliot, Knowledge and Experience, p. 19.
passing comment on the author's personality) Bradley's statement that the self reaches its true greatness when it breaks its bounds and fuses with another self and his other statement that an isolated self cannot even know; but he draws no emphatic conclusions concerning "Tradition and the Individual Talent" from these statements. It is, however, precisely this achievement by the self of its true greatness through a breaking of its own bounds and a fusion with other selves that is involved in the artist's development of an "awareness of the past." That is why the development of this consciousness is "a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable." He as he is at that moment—his "self" as it exists at that moment—is a "construction," an "object" which is "cut out ... from immediate experience"; this self is limited by the idealization, the cutting out, that makes it "this individual self." It is "largely a practical construction"; it is tremendously limited by the dimensions of its usefulness within a very narrow context. To the extent that this construction, together with all the limitations and rigidity that it entails, can be thrown off, to precisely that extent is the artist's experience free to be expanded, enriched, and rearranged by ever new constructions into new "combinations," to precisely that extent does his mind become the sort of "medium ... in which impressions and experiences" can more readily "combine in

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1 Kenner, op. cit., pp. 55-56.
4 Ibid., p. 573. The emphasis is mine.
peculiar and unexpected ways."¹ That is why "the progress of an artist"—specifically qua artist, qua mind-medium—is "a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality,"² or "self."³

Moreover, even if this practical construction called the "self," or the "personality," of the artist were not a hindrance to free creativity, nevertheless, the "individual talent," considered as an isolated "finite center"—or, more precisely, as a "soul"—could never, without help from other souls, create anything "significant," perhaps, indeed, could never create anything at all. The "finite center" (for Eliot, if not for Bradley) "is immediate experience."⁴ "My self 'remains intimately one thing with that finite center within which my universe appears."⁵ "Soul" can be considered from two different points of view: (1) as being "almost the same as finite center"⁶ and (2) as being "only the function of a physical organism," "the soul which can be described by its way of acting upon an environment."⁷ The former is "'a finite center viewed as an object."⁸ It "only differs from the finite center in being considered as something not identical with its states."⁹ The two aspects of soul are "two points of view, which are irreconcilable and yet melt into each other."¹⁰ Now "the

¹Ibid., p. 20.
²Ibid., p. 17. The emphasis are mine.
³This is my interpretation of Eliot's position: "The concepts of center, of soul [on the one hand], and of self and personality [on the other] must be kept distinct." ("Leibniz's Monads and Bradley's Finite Centers," loc. cit., p. 574.)
⁴Ibid. ⁵Ibid., p. 573. ⁶Ibid., p. 574. ⁷Ibid., p. 573, n. 12.
⁸Ibid., p. 574. ⁹Ibid., p. 575.
world . . . is simply the intending of a world by several souls or centers."¹

In the words of Professor Bosanquet, who is often cited by Eliot as a spokesman for idealist orthodoxy, "no phase in a particular consciousness is merely a phase in that consciousness, but it is always and essentially a member of a further whole of experience, which passes through and unites the states of many consciousnesses."² The "independence and isolation of the monads is only a relative and partial aspect."³ The isolated "individual talent," in the context of Eliot's essay, cannot produce anything of "significance."⁴ Anything of significance, any kind of a "world" is always the creation of a number of souls. "The whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of [the poet's] own country," which "has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order"⁵ is simply one quasi world to which this general rule applies. Kenner has stressed the division of this world's existence into its presence in isolated consciousnesses. I wish to stress its co-creation by consciousnesses united in intercommunication. The acceptance of this isolation-union dichotomy is a central theme running from Eliot's dissertation⁶ through the Leibniz-Bradley article and into "Tradition and the Individual Talent." To

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¹Ibid., p. 571. Intending was emphasized by Eliot. I have emphasized several.


⁵Ibid., p. 14.

⁶Eliot, Knowledge and Experience, pp. 141-53.
fail to stress both aspects of this dichotomy, as well as the fact that they are "two points of view, which are irreconcilable and yet melt into each other," is
to misrepresent a fundamental outlook underlying the essay on tradition. It is
because no phase in a particular consciousness can exist that is not always and
essentially a member of a further whole of experience which passes through and
unites the states of many consciousnesses, because of this fact, that "no poet,
no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone," that "his significance,
is his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and art-
ists," that "you cannot value him alone," that "you must set him, for contrast
and comparison, among the dead." It is always "relations" which lead individu-
al "objects" beyond themselves, just as "the feeling Immediate experience which is an object Has become an object" is "expanded because in becoming an
object it has developed relations which lead it beyond itself." And it is al-
ways "coherence" which in an idealist position furnishes a major, if not the on-
ly, criterion of truth or, as in Eliot's variation on the theme, of value:
"... he shall conform, ... he shall cohere; ... the work of art's fitting in is a test of its value." This coherence, it should be noted, is co-
herence with a whole (or, more precisely, in a whole) which does not even begin
to exist until the new work which is cohering is brought into existence. "Con-

1Eliot, "Leibniz's Monads and Bradley's Finite Centers," loc. cit.,
p. 575.

2Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," loc. cit., p. 15. The
emphases are mine.

3Eliot, Knowledge and Experience, p. 23. Cp. also R.W. Church, "Eliot
on Bradley's Metaphysic," The Harvard Advocate, CXXV. 3 (1938), 24-26, for a
brief synopsis of this matter.

formity between the old and the new" consists precisely in this: that "the whole existing order [is], if ever so slightly, altered," so that "the relations [that word again], proportions, values [again] of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted."¹

It is, moreover, precisely in terms of this world cut out of experience by many souls that we must explain Eliot's assertion that "not only the best, but the most individual parts of [a poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."² A poet is not being "individual" in the sense Eliot means when he creates and lives in a separate, isolated world of his own. His individuality, in the only sense in which individuality can have any real "significance," consists in his unique achievement and contribution within the community of poets, in his own particular modification of the entire ideal order created by that community. The point at which "the dead poets . . . assert their immortality most vigorously" is precisely the point at which he is in the most vital contact this ideal order. Therefore, it is at this point also that his individual creativity has its most profound impact upon that order and thus reveals itself most fully for what it is. Moreover, by his consciousness of the order, his awareness of what has already been done, he is able to see more clearly what still remains to be done, what particular contribution his individual talent may be able to make. A bad poet is such because he is "usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious"³ ("because we have never learned to criticize Keats, Shelley, and Wordsworth . . ., Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth punish us from their graves with the anni-

¹Ibid. ²Ibid., p. 11. ³Ibid., p. 21.
al scourge of the Georgian Anthology—"the poet cannot reach this impersonal-
ity of the "emotion of art" without surrendering himself wholly to the work to
be done," a work which "he is not likely to know . . . unless he lives in . . .
the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious . . . of what is already
living"); a bad poet is bad also because he is "conscious" (of those con-
structions which are associated with and constitute his "personality") "where he
ought to be unconscious." 2

Given these qualifications and additions, together with those brought
out in the preceding chapter, we may safely assert that Kenner's interpretation
of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" gives a true picture of Eliot's intend-
ed meaning. That is not to deny that there were many sources for his ideas oth-
er than Bradley. Sean Lucy points to Edmund Burke, 4 Matthew Arnold, 5 George
Saintsbury, 6 T. R. Hulme, 7 and (indirectly) Charles Sainte-Beuve 8 as sources for
Eliot's notions concerning tradition. Kenner himself mentions Schopenhauer
(through the influence of Laforgue), as well as the well-known influence of
Buddhism and other Oriental sources, as contributing to Eliot's sense of poetry,

1 Kenner, op. cit., p. 93, citing Eliot.

emphasis is mine.

3 Ibid., p. 21.

4 Sean Lucy, T. S. Eliot and the Idea of Tradition (London: Cohen &


6 Ibid., p. 32.

7 Ibid., pp. 33-35.

8 Ibid., p. 30.
personality, and history.¹ These men, however, are, more or less, merely sources for Eliot's notions. Idealist philosophy—and, specifically, that of Bradley—on the other hand, is so closely bound up with Eliot's habitual ways of thinking during the period which culminates in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that it forms an absolutely necessary context for the correct interpretation of the essay.

¹Kenner, op. cit., p. 49.
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